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GERMANY'S EDUCATIONAL FAILURE

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It has been the custom in the United States, until a very few months ago, to praise whole-heartedly all features of German education. An English student of our educational system wrote in 1875: "It is the habit of American educationalists ungrudgingly and with sincere admiration to give the palm to Germany." Various American writers on German education, notably Russell and Farrington, have indicated to us those features in which they thought we might do well to copy Germany. German educational leaders, perhaps themselves propagandists sent by their government, such as Münsterberg and Kerschensteiner, have lauded the educational system of the Fatherland most alluringly. "Germania docet" and the whole world, with the possible exception of France, has open-mindedly learned the lessons she has taught.

The voices of criticism of German education have been few and usually weak. A writer in the *Contemporary Review* twelve years ago stated: "England and America have been flooded with a constantly growing stream of books in praise of German education, but I have failed to discover a single book on the failure of German education, although such a book seems to be very urgently required. It is to be hoped that such a book, pointing out the grave defects of German education, will soon be written." Was it? A few Germans were keen enough to see this failure and comment upon it. Bethmann Hollweg said in the Reichstag in 1911: "The fear that we may not be working along the right lines in the education of our youth is a cause of great anxiety to many people in Germany. We shall not solve this problem by shunning it." American visitors to Germany very seldom even saw the inefficient parts of her school system; they were told about the "hits," but not about the "misses"; they returned lauding German education and criticizing

our own, very seldom pointing out any of the many features in which our education far surpassed that of the Germans. We are just beginning to learn that the Japanese proverb "The bottom of the lighthouse is very dark" applies to Germany's educational system. War is a destroyer; it is also a revealer, and one of the things now most patent to any investigator is that in many features German education is far inferior to ours, and that in scarcely any can we really learn from her by imitating; rather let us be warned by her failures.

An unbiased study of Germany's educational system demonstrates immediately that she has a state-centralized system far better than that of any other country, but that this excellent organization is used for a most pernicious end. There are two sets of schools in Germany, one for the poor, another for the middle class and well-to-do. The first provides eight years of schooling and that is all; the school door is absolutely shut in the face of any child who has completed eight years in the *Volksschule*; for the more fortunate child the other system provides education through the university period. The aim of the *Volksschule* is to provide well-trained, brow-beaten, docile followers; that of the higher schools and universities to provide leaders; furthermore, as the number of leaders desired by those in control of Germany is limited, barriers are placed along the way to decrease the number who complete the university course. The world has never seen a more elaborately organized selective system of education. Plato described such a system as the ideal of a philosopher, Jefferson dreamed of it as a democratic American, while Germany has used it to carry out her aim of aristocracy. The student in the *Volksschule* is not supposed to learn; he merely studies. He is not supposed to think for himself; he is not allowed to go to the libraries. Nothing could be more pernicious to the German mind than a *Volksschule* student who does independent thinking. What Germany wishes this school to turn out is a God-fearing, Kaiser-serving citizen. Unthinking obedience to superiors is the ideal. Naturally then Germany has succeeded better than any other nation in making education compulsory. The *Volksschule*, which has been frequently extolled in comparison with American elementary schools, actually

has the frank aim of accomplishing the spiritual and intellectual slavery of its pupils. Whatever excellencies there may be in the method must be entirely outweighed by the damnable aim. Pestalozzi wisely said that the elementary school must make thinkers as well as followers; otherwise "it can only lead to an artificial and methodical dwarfing of humanity." Few of us realize the frankness with which Prussia's rulers have stated that what Pestalozzi feared was the very aim they desired. Emperor Frederick William in 1799 definitely wrote that *Volksschule* students should never be taught so that they might aspire to higher industrial or social positions than their parents held; "the spirit of the age has aroused in all classes of society an unceasing effort to raise one's self above one's social stratum. . . . This evil must be strenuously combated if all human relationships are not finally destroyed." The present emperor, in his famous address in December, 1890, stated that the schools "ought with energy to have instructed the growing generation in such a manner as to furnish Me with material with which I can work within the State. . . . A teacher should do what is demanded from him; he should teach the young and prepare them for resisting all revolutionary aims." It becomes evident then that the aim of the German *Volksschule*, in which 90 per cent of her school population is enrolled, is a brow-beaten proletariat. The growth of socialism in this class in the population, says Paulsen, Germany's greatest educational authority, has made many German leaders urge that this nine-tenths of society receive no education at all in order that it may not have any socialistic aspirations for improving its position or questioning the necessity of obeying its superiors.

The subjects which have been most useful in making puppets of the *Volksschule* students are history and religion. The first is exclusively German, a glorification of German successes and an absolutely untruthful treatment of the history and purposes of all other countries. In Germany history has been prostituted and made to serve the military aims of the state. The teaching of religion is a mere form without any attempt to touch the heart. Its main value to the state is the inculcation of habits of subordination and obedience. Although the Germans teach religion

in their schools vastly more than does any other nation, even before the war they were considered one of the least religious of the civilized peoples. Indeed, so little was religious instruction related to character that they were probably the most immoral of the nations of Europe. Seventy-five years ago Horace Mann was overwhelmed by the amount of vice he saw in Germany. Price Collier wrote more recently: "It has always been the avowed policy of autocracy to atone for the lack of political freedom by lax regulations in regard to moral matters. Drinking, gambling, and other forms of vice are provided comfortably and, comparatively speaking, cheaply." It seems that the formalistic religious instruction in the schools may be justly held accountable for much of the immorality characteristic of Germany before the war, and even probably for the terrible atrocities which her soldiers have perpetrated since. In Macaulay's words, Germany is an example of "high intellectuality with low morality."

The part of the German school system which has been least studied by Americans is the *Volksschule*. Alexander's scholarly work, which has just been published, tells us many things about this school which we did not know and which Germany did not desire us to learn; she preferred that we should concentrate our attention on her higher schools and universities; but the *Volksschule*, enrolling 90 per cent of the school population, is after all the school by which Germany's educational school system should be considered a success or a failure. Germany spends between \$15 and \$16 each year for each pupil in this school; for the education of each pupil in the higher schools, \$70 or over; about one-quarter of the total school expenditure is devoted to train less than one-tenth of the pupils. In America we spend \$20.38 for each child of school age (six to eighteen); as not all the children of this age are in the schools, the actual amount spent is probably over \$25 per pupil. In our elementary schools we have been working earnestly to decrease the number of pupils per teacher. The average in German elementary schools is 55, in her higher schools, 18. In Prussia in 1912 there were 7,396 classes averaging 165 pupils to a teacher. There was one extreme case of 230 in a class. (It should be remembered that the percentage of enrolment in actual attendance in

Germany is very high, so that the numbers stated indicate the actual size of the class on nearly every school day.) In Prussia 80 is supposed to be the maximum; when one realizes that half of all the schools in Prussia are one-teacher schools and that in each such school the teacher is supposed to cover six years of work, one can draw one's own conclusions about the German schools being supreme. Obviously such a thing as attention to the individual elementary pupil is impossible and unthought of in Germany.

We are sincerely striving to decrease the percentage of retardation in our schools. In the *Volksschule* over 55 per cent of the children are retarded at some time during their course. Out of 1,000 Prussian elementary-school children who had completed eight years in school, 448 had reached (not necessarily completed) the eighth year, 261 the seventh, 181 the sixth, 88 the fifth, 22 the fourth. Nor is this the whole story. The *Volksschule* pupil is required by law to attend school for eight years, from the age of six to fourteen. A very large number of the schools, however, have only six classes; consequently the pupil who is promoted according to schedule spends the last two years of his compulsory school period in going over the work of the two previous years which he has already passed. Of the elementary-school children 4,000,000 are in schools of six or fewer grades; 2,000,000 in schools of seven grades; 500,000, one-fifteenth of the entire school population, in schools that provide eight classes for the eight-year compulsory school period.

The equipment in the average German elementary school would not make the American educator envious. Ventilation is usually entirely lacking; American visitors have suffered from headache and nausea in an atmosphere which is typical of all German schools. Individual seats are almost unknown. Benches are provided, seating from four to eight pupils. The seats, of course, cannot be adapted at all to the needs of the individual child; they are usually only half as wide as the type of seat considered satisfactory in our schools. The average blackboard in a German elementary school is only 4 by 6 feet.

The elementary teacher in Germany is a drillmaster who maintains military discipline in his school, striving to subjugate instead of to educate the pupils, resorting to corporal punishment for the

slightest reasons. The method which he pursues is to lecture to the pupils, requiring them to repeat, usually verbatim, what he has explained. Memoriter work is demanded to an extent that would dumbfound an up-to-date American teacher. Thinking on the part of pupils is not considered necessary. All the teachers are government servants appointed by the government by whom alone they can be removed. Four-fifths of the elementary-school teachers in Germany are men; obviously the education which little girls in the elementary schools receive from this type of teacher cannot seem ideal to an American. The elementary schools are not professionally supervised. Usually the clergy of the community is responsible for seeing that government educational edicts are carried out. Of the supervisors of Prussian elementary schools 67 per cent give only part time to this work; manifestly they are not, in the American sense, professionally trained school directors.

The three types of German secondary schools, which do not correspond to our high schools as they provide practically all the education necessary before admission to the university, have usually received praise from American educational critics. It is in keeping with the German educational ideal, although directly opposed to ours, that only 8 per cent of German pupils of secondary-school age are in school in Germany; with us the figure is 30 per cent. There are only about 1,200 schools to prepare pupils for university work in all Prussia. Probably at least 25 per cent of the pupils in German higher schools are retarded; the German educational officials frankly say that they "prefer to throw a curtain over this." This is a percentage of retardation which would be appalling in an American secondary school. The figures for elimination from school are even worse, at least from our standpoint; the German says quite bluntly, "It is the duty of the school to take measures to prevent ungifted sons of well-to-do families from getting into universities and so on the way toward leading positions." The percentage of pupils in the German secondary schools who complete the work is much smaller than in America, where constant effort is being made to increase the percentage. The pupil who completes six years in a German secondary school may serve in the army for one year as a volunteer; in the *Gymnasium* 25 per cent of the pupils

drop out at this place, in the *Realgymnasium* 35 per cent, and in the *Oberrealschule*, 52 per cent. The total percentage of elimination for all causes before the course is completed is for the schools just mentioned 50 per cent, 80 per cent, and 85 per cent.

The aim of the secondary-school course in Germany is usually not educational; it is military. Russell says, "The average school-boy seems to consider schooling a necessary evil, something to be endured patiently, resolutely, faithfully, if only thereby he may escape social damnation." This escape is by way of one year's military service as a volunteer, which makes a later career as an officer possible. The lack of physical exercise and play in the German secondary school is striking. Collier states that as a result of this 45 per cent of those who complete the six-year higher-school course are found to be physically unfit for military service.

The German secondary school is a machine run by the state to prepare officers and leaders. The public has no rights in it; it is only under exceptional circumstances that a parent may visit a school; criticisms of the school by the public are unthought of. The teacher is a state official to whom deference is paid by pupil and parent alike.

There is little that the American wishes to imitate in the German universities. They are exclusively professional. There is no such thing as an "arts course" corresponding to our B.A. course. The students are indifferent to their work to an extent startling to an American. Bethmann-Hollweg, objecting to this "know it all" attitude, said to the *Gymnasium* leaders: "Our young people mostly come to the university flabby and flat. Do try to see that they leave for it more ignorant." The German higher school and university give almost no consideration to women, who, according to the German scheme of things as announced by the Kaiser, are to devote themselves to children, church, and kitchen. Coeducation is almost entirely lacking in the higher schools. There are relatively few secondary schools for girls; indeed in all Germany only thirty that prepare for the universities. The total enrolment of women in the universities is about 5,000.